175 Baangoni had to give up their plan to subjugate the Babembas. They turned towards Tabora. After their victory over the Baangoni, the Babemba on the other hand, carried the war into the territories of their cowardly neighbors, whom they subjugated and ruled with an [797] iron hand. When Mgr. Dupont came to the terrible kingdom of the Babemba for the first time, the tribe had established its rule over a territory which was twice the size of the present Vicarage. The neighboring tribes would tremble at the mere mention of the word [648] Babemba. Even today we can hear songs cursing the cruelty of the Babemba among the tribes of Tanganyika and Broken Hill.

161 The present population of the Babemba is about 100, 000. The wars of the past have decimated them.

181 The most outstanding characteristic of the Babemba is that they are a war-like tribe to the highest degree, dreaming only of pillage, battle, submission of neighboring tribes, imposition of overburdening tributes, expansion and aggrandizement of the kingdom, but all this by means of a civil and military organization which is indeed remark- [157] able. The Babemba are one of the most intelligent races of Africa. [193] They have an exceedingly rich language including more than 20, 000 [538] words; they have a literature of their own consisting of martial poetry, songs of all kinds, more than 1500 proverbs, several hundred riddles, about a thousand axioms, etc.; a treasure bequeathed by their ancestors

157 In mining centers the Babembas are known for their keenness [zeal], their polite manners, their respect for authority, and their spirit of initiative.

484 My picture would not be complete if I did not mention the fact that the Babemba of today are perhaps the greatest adventurers of Central Africa. You meet Babemba everywhere. There are Babemba in Zanzibar, Panda, Lindi, Bulawayo, in Broken Hill, the Belgian Congo, in Transvaal and on the Cape. The Mubemba does not find it difficult to move; he can take care of himself, and he is at home everywhere.

584 ENGAGEMENT [Kukobeka]: Engagement takes place at an early age, around ten or twelve years, when the young betrothed are not yet nubile [amabele tayalakula]. [21]

Consent: An emissary [Shibukombe], who does not belong to the clan of those who wish to become engaged, is chosen. He is a man who enjoys a certain amount of prestige in the village and can speak out

plainly. The young man who desires to become engaged lives with his parents; the young girl lives with her mother. The fiancé buys the fiancée with a present /mpango, nsalamu/, which usually consists of copper or ivory bracelets /nsambo, makosa/, or beads /bulungu/. The parents tell the emissary that their son is already grownup and wishes to marry a certain girl. They explain to him that they have met /kuishibana/. The emissary rises and takes the presents to the young girl's parents; he explains the purpose of his coming. Then all the kinsmen of this clan /mukowa/ meet in the hut of the young girl's parents in order to give their opinion with regard to consent and in this manner to avoid any possible difficulties which might arise later /pa kuti babâfwe ko ukusumina uyu mwaume, bekasosa limbi, fikanasa nda fyaisa limbi abati: ifwe tatwali ko nga twalikene mwaume/. When everyone has agreed and consented to the engagement, they tell the emissary: "We agree, let the young man come here and be betrothed to our daughter" /Chisuma naese ope, natutemwa/. The emissary rises and returns to the young man's parents' home. He tells them what has been decided /abeda no mo ere umfwila mulandu/. The father and mother tell their son: "Go and get your tree-bark fabrics which you must offer as a present" /filundu/. 584

Filundu. The fiancé's father has previously manufactured two filundu (costumes of ficus bark). He gives them to the emissary to seal the engagement alliance. The latter places them in a basket, along with the beads and other presents, and returns to the parents of the fiancée. If everyone consents again, the engagement pact is concluded. The parents of the fiancée then take possession of the presents /kulya mpango/, the maternal uncle /nalume/ takes possession of one of the two filundu, while the father takes the other costume. [292]

Engagement Banquet at the House of the Fiancé: /kutebeta/. The fiancé's parents try to obtain a chicken; they kill it. They then have plenty of flour ground. They prepare an enormous amount of mush /bwali/ and a big bowl of seasoning /munani/ with beans /chilemba/ and spinach /musalu/. This is another occasion for offering presents /kushikula/: they place one bracelet on the bwali, another on /212/ the chicken, and the beads are placed in the pitcher which contains water for washing hands. As a mark of respect the food is always covered by a basket /balakupika po/. They also invite several kinswomen, who bring food in small covered baskets /fyakupikwa/. [262] [576]

Then the Shibukombe (emissary) is invited, whose job it is to uncover 584
the covered baskets. In payment for his work he may take all the
small presents placed on top of the food /no tuntu toonse tulya
bashikwile pa bwali, fyakwe/.

Period Between the Engagement and Nubility: /kukûba/. During the 583
period preceeding nubility the fiancée often goes to her fiancé's hut
in order to do small chores, such as sweeping, lighting the fire, draw-
ing water or whitewashing the house. These chores are supposed to
reveal to the fiancé the devotion and skill of his future wife
/kuchichila/. Furthermore, she will live in her fiancé's house for
a considerable time in order to show that she is docile /kupetama/.

When his fiancée is on the eve of menstruation, the fiancé
goes to live with his father-in-law /shifyala/. He does several favors
for him. As a token of respect, the food which is offered him is al- [576]
ways covered by a basket. His bwali will be offered him uncovered
only on the day when the Shibukombe is invited to uncover the wed-
ding bwali, before which the latter will pour water for him to wash
his hands /kusambikisha/, and after having whitened the spot where
the fiancé washed his hands (nsoni shapwa) with clayey soil
(kushingula).

Chisungu (Menstruation). In the forest. When the fiancée has her 881
first period, /kuwa chisungu/, she runs to hide in the forest. After
finding her, her kinswomen collect around her in order to make cer-
tain of the fact /bamukunsha/. They then break small branches from
the trees, and while dancing they sing as follows: "We have gone to
tell the little spotted lion-cub that his master has come" /Twaire
sobera nkalamo ya mabala chibinda taluba/. They then go to the
fiancé's house, and place their branches on the roof saying: "Nshimba,
nshimba" (wild cat). From this moment on, the fiancé takes the name
of shichisungu, and the fiancée, nachisungu.

At home. Then the women go to find the nachisungu (the
nubile fiancée) in the forest, and after having submitted her to vari-
ous /213/ tests, such as jumping across a bundle of fire-wood or drink-
ing water from a jug which contains small tadpoles, they carry her
back to her home on their shoulders. The fiancée's father leaves his
hut and goes to stay elsewhere. Henceforth there will be the mako [784]

2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

Water must also be fetched from the stream morning and evening (*ukutapa menshi*). A good housewife always has one or two *inongo* full of water standing to cool in her hut, and has warm water ready in the early morning for her husband to wash in, and for the baby's bath. No man ever draws for himself under village conditions, and the fetching of water is reckoned one of the essential duties of a wife.[1] The provision of drinking water for her husband is equally a woman's duty, and at a chief's court where old-fashioned ceremony is still observed, his wives kneel to offer him water in a gourd.

Besides collecting wood and water the woman has to provide relish, and this takes up much of her time at certain seasons of the year. During the rainy months regular expeditions are made daily to look for mushrooms. Women and girls go out with carrying baskets and line up across the bush, each picking what she finds. Such an expedition might take two or three hours. Wild spinaches have also to be looked for, and in the hot weather the girls are sent to gather *icikanda* orchids which grow in certain spots known to the natives, or the different wild fruits. Even when garden vegetables are available it may be necessary to walk two or three miles to a distant field to pick them. This is specially so when the gourds and pumpkins ripen, and it is reckoned that every other day the housewife must go out to her gardens to pick them (*ukusaba*) as they reach their prime. All these accessory activities have somehow to be fitted into the day besides the regular gardening and cooking.

The main processes of porridge making and cooking relish are themselves lengthy. The average time taken by seven women to thresh, winnow, and grind flour was 7·4 minutes a pound, and since about six pounds would be used daily by an ordinary family the time taken would be about three-quarters of an hour.[2] These women were, however, working uninterruptedly and knew they were being timed. An hour would be a more likely time under normal conditions. Different relishes take half to three-quarters

[1] A middle-aged widower and widow were discussing the possibility of marriage prosaically together. The would-be bridegroom said, 'Are you the kind of woman who always has hot water ready for her husband in the morning, and never grumbles when he asks for more?' The prospective bride answered, 'Yes, that is what I do. But are you the kind of man who gives his wife a new cloth occasionally and doesn't spend his money all on himself?'

[2] For note [2] see next page.

3: Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1956
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

Introduction

The chisungu of the Bemba is usually described either as a puberty rite for girls or as a female initiation ceremony. It consists of a long and rather elaborate succession of ritual acts which includes miming, singing, dancing and the handling of sacred emblems. In the old days the chisungu invariably preceded the marriage of a young girl, and was an integral part of the series of ceremonies by which a bridegroom was united to the family group of his bride, in a tribe in which descent is reckoned through the woman and not through the man, and in which a man comes to live with his wife's relatives at marriage rather than a woman with her husband's.

Ceremonies similar to the chisungu have been reported from other matrilineal areas of Central Africa. They exist, for instance amongst the tribes most akin to the Bemba, such as the Bisa, Lamba and the Kaonde, as well as amongst the Cewa and the Yao of Nyasaland. They have also been reported from the North-western Province of Northern Rhodesia in the country inhabited by the Ila, the Tonga and the Sala. They occur here and there in the Belgian Congo and Angola.[1] In spite of the wide distribution of these ceremonies however we have, as yet, no full description of any one of them, nor any detailed analysis of the function they appear to fulfil. It would be true to say that, in general, puberty ritual for girls has received rather scant attention in comparison with the very full treatment which has been accorded to the various initiation ceremonies practised for boys.

Puberty ritual sets complex problems for the anthropologist. It celebrates the attainment of sex maturity in the boy or the girl, and hence the physical possibility of parenthood. Naturally enough, it reflects tribal attitudes to sex, fertility, marriage and the rearing of children, and expresses, and tries to enforce, the

[1] See Appendix A.

3: Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1956
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

583 ceremony and gave a bark-cloth or money to the mistress of the ceremonies for 'dancing his bride'.

The characteristic feature of the old Bemba marriage was the small size of the payments in comparison with those made in the cattle marriages of the Southern and Eastern Bantu. The *mpango* gave the father those limited rights he secured over his children, although it did not, in this matrilineal society, give him complete control over his son or daughter, and never gave him, or his lineage, control over his wife's reproductive powers as does the cattle *lobola* among the Southern Bantu.[1]

●584 The stages by which the marriage relationship is gradually developed in the case of a girl's first union are as follows:

(*a*) *The betrothal* (*ukukobeka*)—literally 'to hook yourself down a branch from a tree'. Boys and girls meet at dances during the harvest season, or when visiting from village to village. The young man then proposes to the girl and sends his betrothal present (*nsalamo*). The boy's family should give approval but this did not seem essential in 1931. The consent of the girl's parents and her mother's brother and father's sister was, however, a necessary step in marriage negotiations.

The betrothal ceremony was usually accompanied by an exchange of beer and cooked food between the families. The *ukukobeka* was not however considered a very serious or binding step, but merely one stage in the trial and error process of contracting marriage. It often took place during the childhood of the boy and girl.

(*b*) *The courtship visits* (*ukwishisha*). The bride and her friends then visit the bridegroom in his village. The girl friends may laugh and talk with the boys they visit, but the bride, if she is nearing puberty, or has reached it, must sit with downcast eyes and will only be tempted to enter her future husband's hut by a little present and will only talk to him if he gives her another small gift.

(*c*) *The boy's move to his bride's village.* If the bridegroom has reached puberty, he then moves to his father-in-law's village and builds himself a hut and starts to work for his wife's family.

[1] The extent to which the introduction of money payments has altered the old Bemba marriage system is fully discussed in my *Bemba Marriage and Modern Economic Conditions*, Rhodes-Livingstone Institute Paper, No. 4, 1940.

3: Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1956
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

The Marriage Contract

The ceremonial admission of the son-in-law to the wife's village takes place in stages throughout the next few months or even years. These include: 584

(*d*) *The food offerings.* The ceremonial offering of cooked food to the bridegroom is considered exceedingly important by the Bemba and both parties to the marriage watch eagerly to see if the presents have been made with due respect. When first betrothed the young man may not eat the gifts of food sent him by his mother-in-law as he is still keeping food taboos. He divides the food among his friends. Then one of his supporters is bound to say casually 'The stranger's child (i.e. the outsider) is wasting with hunger'. This is a hint that the big feast of admission of the son-in-law should take place. All the bride's family are asked to bring beer, meat or porridge and each dish must be covered carefully with a basket and a small gift, such as a bangle, laid on top. Bemba delight to describe this feast in great detail and it is represented in mime in the chisungu ceremony. The bride's family then says to the mother of the bridegroom 'We have shown the son-in-law the fire, now he will eat food with us'. The boy nevertheless has to be made free to eat each different food used by the tribe. He is given a small dish of porridge one day, then beans, then meat, then fish. This is known as the formal presentation. Similar ceremonial removal of taboos takes place with regard to the bride entering her husband's village among some of the Southern Bantu.

(*e*) *The handing over of the bride.* The giving of the bride to her husband also takes place in a number of stages. At first the young man asks for someone to sweep his hut and to fetch him water and his betrothed may be allowed to do this for him. Having gradually won the right to her domestic services, payment gives him the privilege of taking his young bride to sleep with him. This stage of the marriage continues until the young girl is about to reach puberty when her mother will take her away for fear she bears a child before her chisungu ceremony.

(*f*) After this comes the chisungu ceremony which is the subject of this book and this is followed by the consummation of the marriage. The bride must be tempted by gifts to enter her husband's hut. Ritual surrounds the first act of intercourse, and when the marriage is consummated the bridegroom throws a 585

3: Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1956
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

ooo than required as a duty. The *butwa* society of the Western Congo is a case in point.

(*e*) ***Maturation rites dissociated with puberty.*** The complete separation of puberty rites proper from those of social maturation is seen in those societies where the one is followed by the other. Among the Akamba of Kenya for instance there were triple ceremonies for boys and girls; these included simple puberty ceremonies for individuals followed by the 'small initiation ceremonies' at which circumcision took place, and the 'great initiation ceremonies', only performed occasionally, for adult men who had reached special wealth and honour in the tribe.

X 881 783 The Bemba chisungu is an individual nubility rite practised for each girl, or for two or three girls together and it is preceded by a short puberty ceremony proper. When a girl knows that her first period has come she tells older women and they must 'bring her to the hearth' again (*ukumufishyo peshiko*), or 'show her the fire' (*ukumulanga umulilo*) since her condition has made her 'cold'. This is done by rites which vary slightly from locality to locality. The *ukusolwela* ceremony is one in which doctored seeds are cooked on a fire and the girl must pull them out and eat them burning hot. In another rite she is washed with medicine cooked in a special pot and she drinks this medicine too. She is then isolated indoors for a day or more and fed with a small ball of millet porridge cooked in new fire so that she may be made free to eat again without harming herself or others. This is the usual Bemba way of returning to the community a person who has passed through an unusual or dangerous state.

X 881 584 The girl then waits till it is convenient for her chisungu ceremony to be danced. I call this latter a nubility rite since it is clearly considered as a preliminary to the marriage ceremony; indeed, Bemba accounts frequently confuse the two. Formerly the girl came to her chisungu already betrothed, and this is usually the case today. The bridegroom plays a part in the rite in his own person, or is represented by his sister. He contributes to the cost of the rite by paying the mistress of the ceremonies. The chisungu protects the young couple against the magic dangers of first intercourse and gives the bridegroom the right to perform this act, which is thought to be entirely different from all that follow it, in

3: Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1956
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

or out of marriage. Anyone who takes this right from him is said to steal or spoil the chisungu.

The actual ceremony I witnessed will now be described.

The presentation of this type of ritual material raises difficulties. The chisungu ceremony I attended in 1931 lasted continuously for over a month. (I was told that in the old days the rites would have spread over six months or more.) During this time I saw over eighteen separate ceremonies in the initiation hut and surrounding bush; each of these can be split into a number of simpler ritual acts the symbolism of which was as obscure to some of the observers as it was to me. Over forty different pottery emblems were made and handled during the ceremony and a number of others have come to my notice since that date. The walls of the hut were painted with nine different designs on the occasion in question.[1] I recorded over fifty special chisungu songs during the rite and I should estimate that those I was able to take down formed a little over half the total sung.

The rites include dramatic episodes which could not fail to strike the imagination of any onlooker, but these were interspersed with days and nights of incessant dancing, which were wearying even to watch. They are likely to be even more tedious to read about.

It would, of course, be possible to make the material more readable by rigid selection, and the Bemba themselves eliminate detail in the most ruthless fashion when providing outline accounts of the chisungu to European enquirers. (See page 135.) But if an account of a series of rites is to be given at all, it must surely be complete. Omission merely reflects the anthropologist's own threshold of boredom. Puberty ritual is of interest to different types of scientists. There is, for instance, no full account of the nubility ceremonial from this area and, to the ethnologist interested in mapping out the affinities of different cultural groups of the area, the presence or absence of a particular detail of ritual may be of the utmost significance.

The psychologist studying symbolic behaviour, or the linguist interested in the ritual use of language, needs to know the whole system of symbols used if he is to draw deductions from the material. I have, therefore, given all the song and mime data I

[1] Vernon Brelsford has published line drawings of sixteen others, cf. 'Some reflections on Bemba geometric art', *Bantu Studies*, vol. XI, 1937.

3: Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1956
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

881 554 463 793 present, but *banacimbusa* are rather wealthier than their fellows owing to the payments they receive, and they carry themselves with considerable dignity and circumstance.

[608] The *nacimbusa* stands in a special relationship to the girl she has initiated throughout her life. She will probably deliver the girl's first child and act as *mbosua*, or special guardian, to the baby.

881 202 576 *The messenger.* In the old days when the exchange of feasts formed a more important part of the ceremony than they do now, the *nacimbusa* was assisted by a woman known as the *nakalamba*, who was employed to invite the guests to the ceremony by rolling on the ground in front of their houses—the Bemba form of obeisance to a chief. They also fetched clay for the pottery and supervised the ritual cooking of the food.

881 584 *The candidates and their bridegrooms.* The initiation candidate is known as the *nacisungu*. As I have said, these girls were usually betrothed before the ceremony, but it was possible to carry out rites in the case of a girl who was not yet affianced. The bridegroom of a betrothed girl takes part in certain of the ceremonies under the title of *shibwinga*, and this term is also extended to the sister or cross-cousin who may replace him in certain parts of the ceremony.

881 593 604 *The relatives.* Other relatives include the girl's parents and her father's sister. The girl's mother is responsible for providing food and beer, and her father's sister is believed to have a special influence over the fertility of her paternal niece and to stand in a special relationship to her. But the ring of relatives is comparatively small. The uxorilocal family is the chief unit involved.

881 533 *The character of the rite.* The chisungu is a popular ceremony involving much dancing and singing. There is a special drum-beat characteristic of chisungu ceremonies which is frequently used at ordinary beer feasts and always used throughout the rite. Drums are beaten inside the initiation hut, and on the dancing space outside, but they are also carried wherever the women go, some miles out into the bush and back again. The singing is accompanied, as always among the Bemba, by the beat of the drums and by the clapping of hands. Some songs are peculiar to the ceremony and are necessary parts of the rite, but some can be sung at other times. All the chisungu dances are of a characteristic type. They

881 535

3: Richards E-5 (1930-1934) 1956
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

Songs Sung During the Ceremony

881X 533

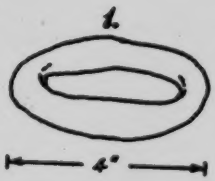
Ualele cisungu, — You have slept with the chisungu child, [539]

Ualele nkalamo. — You have slept with the lion.

Interpretation. It is dangerous to sleep with a girl after puberty. It is like the danger of the lion. The young man is warned not to sleep with his bride without the right precautions.

II

The songs that follow are those which are sung when the girl is 881X presented with her pottery figurines.[1] The majority of the songs 533 are given here, but omissions have been made when the meaning of 778 the song is very obscure.



[532]

Fig. 1. *The bracelet*

No. 38. *The bracelet* (*likosa*) Fig. 1. This is a model of a bracelet. It is put over the wrist of the girl, or else swung in her hand. The following words are sung:

Kampele mulume, — It was given me by my husband, [539]

Akakanyanda. — The little house.

Mayo tambene! — Mother look at it!

Interpretation. It is the husband's duty to clothe his wife and the bracelet represents this obligation. The betrothal present (*nsalamo*) is also usually a bracelet. The initiate is ritually clothed [584] with bracelets made of grass at the end of the chisungu when she is ceremonially bathed in the river (p. 109). Hence the girl calls her mother to look at what her husband has given her, i.e. the bracelet,

[1] The collection I made for the museums of the Universities of Johannesburg and Cape Town differ slightly from that seen at Cisonde village. The former have been described by Schofield. Op. cit.

4: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1909)1910 FT7 Yao
Bemba FQ5

rattle who ran in front of it, and by whom the *Ringas* made appearance of being baffled. The performance was witnessed by a circle of women and a few men. When the moon gave evidence of rising the figures disappeared.

The following morning the girl was again brought to the *bwalo* about 11 a.m. and seated on a mat between her "friend" and her mother, while the women danced to the time of seven drums. Her head was anointed with water and shaved, the process was started by a woman and then finished by a man, apparently the village barber; the left side of the head was shaved first. The mother was shaved by a woman at the same time.

While this was going on, presents were being made—maize, beads, a chicken, tobacco, bracelets, etc. When the shaving was finished several women came and spoke to the girl, after which she was taken away for the bathing in the lake close at hand, returning about 1 p.m. in new blue calico from waist to knees with white sash, the body well oiled all over, to the time of one small drum played by an old man; then, supported on either side by two "friends," she waited a few moments while several women did a few shuffling steps, she then advanced alone and did a few steps. She then made a present of a chicken and tobacco to the drummer, and then to her father, kneeling to each. Again she danced alone, running to and fro

FIG. 2.

and spinning round quickly. During this time two masks, the *Sanchuna* and *Nkolola* (Fig. 2), appeared and mixed with crowd, danced about and made funny remarks; they went up to the girl and performed a kind of *danse-du-ventre*.

After thus dancing in the village she goes round to the houses of all her relatives, beginning at her father's house, and repeats the dance together with addition of a little *danse-du-ventre*, the masks (*Sanchuna* and *Nkolola*) go round with her, her immediate attendant being always her "friend." This night and the next day she spends in the house with her friend, the evening of the next day she goes to a separate house arranged for, and has to have coitus with a man who is asked to oblige; on emission taking place he has to withdraw in time, and the semen is collected on a cloth which has to be seen by the women. The following night she goes to the house of her betrothed to live with him; she has probably been betrothed since she was an infant.

About the *Sanchuna* and *Nkolola* I could learn nothing. These men wore masks with calico covering the back of the head and neck, a kilt made of stripe of leopard skin and grass bound round their arms and legs.